

U.S. Naval Asylum, Governor's Residence
(U.S. Naval Home, Governor's Residence)
Southwest corner Gray's Ferry Avenue and
and Twenty-fourth Street
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1622 B

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577B-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

UNITED STATES NAVAL ASYLUM, GOVERNOR'S RESIDENCE
(United States Naval Home, Governor's Residence)

HABS No. PA-1622-B

Location: Southwest corner of Gray's Ferry Avenue and Twenty-fourth Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania. The building is located approximately 150' northeast of Biddle Hall.

Present Owner: General Services Administration; surplus property since 1976.

Significance: The Governor's Residence is a fine Greek Revival structure of handsome proportions and fine detail, designed by William Strickland, one of the major 19th century architects. The building is identical in design to the neighbor house, Surgeon's Residence (HABS No. PA-1622-C), also designed by Strickland.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1844.
2. Architect: William Strickland (1788-1854).
3. Original and subsequent owners: From 1844 to 1976 the property was owned by the U.S. Navy for use as a governor's residence. Today it is owned by the General Services Administration.
4. Alterations and additions: Modernization of parts of rear pantry and kitchen area was undertaken. A bathroom was added in the front central room in the second floor. Other alterations have not been documented.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house has a symmetrical front (east) with a two-story veranda. A central hall floor plan is used.
2. Condition of fabric: The building has been in excellent condition for many years. However, after General Services Administration took possession of the building in 1976, the structure is in deteriorating condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building measures approximately 47' (three-bay front) x 100'. It is two stories high.
2. Foundations: Coursed granite ashlar.
3. Walls: Stucco on brick.
4. Structural system, framing: Not documented.
5. Porches: First and second floor front verandas, each with four pairs of slender cast-iron columns. The columns are fluted and have lotus-leaf capitals. The ornamented cast-iron railings are decorated with naval motifs -ropes, anchors, eagles, and dolphins.
6. Chimneys: Two chimneys on each side elevation are joined with the parapet wall. Each chimney is of brick construction with concrete and metal flashing.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Central entry has wooden double doors of four panels and five-pane sidelights.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The sash is six-over-six lights. No shutters are present, but the old brackets for shutters are still in place in first and second floor window openings.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Hipped; standing metal seam.
 - b. Cornice: Wooden box cornice above plain entablature and topped by parapet.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: A central hall floor plan is used in the main portion. Two rooms each side flank the hall. The stairway is in the center. A double sitting room is in the south side, and a front parlor and a rear dining room are in the north side. Similar arrangement is used in the bedroom story. The rear two-story, two-room kitchen wing is entered from the main portion through the central hall. The kitchen wing is also entered from a north exterior door.

2. Stairway: The main stairway is of typical mid-19th century design, often seen in other houses of this period. It is open string and has a handsome fluted newel post, a mahogany handrail, and turned wood balusters.
3. Flooring: 1 3/4" maple strip floor in first floor; parquet oak floor in upstairs story.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls. Ceilings were not documented.
5. Decorative features and trim: Greek Revival interior trim is noteworthy. Doorways are decorated with architraves and cornices.

In the first floor double sitting room, an elaborate screen of two columns divides the two rooms. The columns are fluted and have lotus-leaf capitals, like the exterior porch columns, with the exception of their wider shafts. Windows have folding paneled shutters. The ceilings have large recessed panels and medallions in a leaf pattern. The recessed panels are surrounded by an egg-and-dart molding. The cornice has a water leaf-and-dart molding.

Other fine interior details elsewhere in the house are not documented.

6. Hardware: Boxlock on first floor northeast door.
7. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: The parlor and dining rooms have black marble fireplaces with coal grates. Modern heating was by small tube cast-iron radiators.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

Two drawings: "Northeast flank (Governor's Residence), U.S. Naval Asylum," July 28, 1844, signed "W. Strickland Archt."; Southeast (front) elevation signed by William Strickland. Place of their repository not noted.

B. Bibliography:

1. Secondary and published sources:

American Guide Series. Philadelphia. Philadelphia: William Penn Association, 1937. pp. 502-04.

Gilchrist, Agnes Addison. William Strickland, Architect and Engineer, 1788-1854. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950.

Shippen, Edward, M.D., U.S.N. "Some Account of the Origin of the Naval Asylum at Philadelphia." Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Bibliography, VII, No. 2 (1883), pp. 117ff.

Massey, James C., ed. "Two Centuries of Philadelphia Architectural Drawings." Philadelphia: Society of Architectural Historians and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1964. pp. 26-27.

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ADDENDUM TO:
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